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ABSTRACT

This performance guide is designed for teachers to use with students before and after a performance of "The Book of Miracles," by David S. Craig and Robert Morgan. The guide, called a "Cuesheet," contains seven activity sheets for use in class, addressing: (1) What Happens in "The Book of Miracles?" (introducing the story, the cast, and some important vocabulary); (2) Forming Mental Images (with information about how women were forbidden to appear on stage at many times in theatre history, and with activities encouraging students to form mental images of characters and settings of the play); (3) Listen for These Lines (discussing the willing suspension of disbelief and other theatre conventions, and presenting certain lines from the play for discussion); (4) Building the Magic: Audience Collaboration (offering some tips on the audience's role in live theatre); (5) "The Book of Miracles": Allegory and Symbols (explaining allegory and symbol, and looking at what they might mean in this play); (6) After the Performance Activities (with suggested activities for after the performance); and (7) From Childhood to Adulthood (offering a discussion of how, in various cultures, children know when they are grown up). Resources for further exploration are listed. (SR)

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"The Book of Miracles" by David S. Craig, The Roseneath Theater of Canada. Cue Sheet.

by Suzanne Pratt

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CUE SHEET

the Book of Miracles

by David S. Craig
and Robert Morgan

The Rosenaath Theater of Canada

Welcome to *Cuesheet*, a performance guide published by the Education Department of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C. This *Cuesheet* is designed to be used before and after attending a performance of *The Book of Miracles*.

What's in Cuesheet?

What Happens in *The Book of Miracles?*, page 2

Forming Mental Images, page 3

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Building the Magic: Audience Collaboration, page 5

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What Happens in The Book of Miracles?

The Story

Long ago, in the land of Haven, magic is real. The Book of Miracles, the source of magic, is kept in the Temple of Doors by the Havenites, who once enslaved their Brohmian neighbors.

On the darkest night of the year, at the moment of the **lunar eclipse,** a young Havenite girl, Sessaylin, is to be **initiated** as an adult magician. Her old blind teacher, Brisbad, has come to witness the ceremony.

lunar eclipse: a temporary event when the moon is obscured by the earth's shadow

initiation: ceremony of admission into a society

vapor: a mist or fog

Sessaylin is frightened when she sees Maliss, the Fire Master, secretly leave the ceremony. She follows him to the seashore. The powerful and evil Geddon appears and announces to Maliss that he will take the power of the fire and control the magic as well. The "Seeds of Fear"—his weapon—freeze his victims, the adult Havenites, with "a vile black **vapor.**"

Old Brisbad rescues the last page of The Book of Miracles, the Hero Spell, and begins to help Sessaylin fly away to seek the aid of the Old Mother. But Sessaylin becomes stranded alone in the land of the Brohmians, where she meets Dahntz, the gentle son of the brave Brohmian leader. Even though Havenites and Brohmians are raised not to trust each other, Sessaylin and Dahntz become friends. Dahntz leads Sessaylin to the cave of the Old Mother, who helps them discover their hidden power and defeat Geddon's evil.

The Cast of Characters

Two actors play all seven roles.

The actor named Dave plays:

Sessaylin, a young Havenite girl

Maliss, The Fire Master, and traitor to the Havenites

Draymore, a Brohmian leader, father of Dahntz

Geddon, a powerful evil creature

The actor named Robert plays:

Brisbad, Sessaylin's old blind teacher

Dahntz, a young Brohmian boy

Old Mother, a woman who helps Sessaylin & Dahntz

Geddon, a powerful evil creature (Yes! Both actors play this role at different times).

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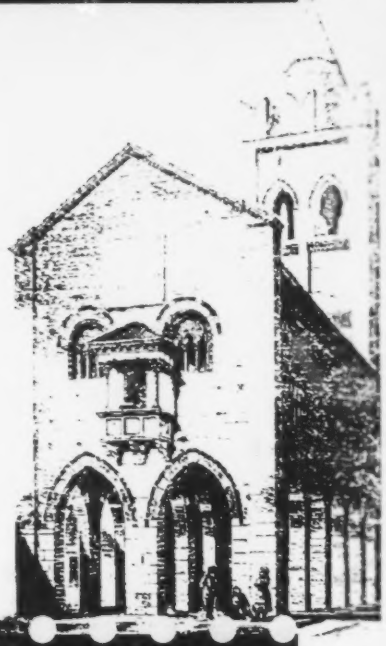

In The Book of Miracles, two actors play all the parts without costume changes. By altering their voices and movements, they help you imagine the various characters. After reading the plays synopsis on page 2, how do you imagine the characters Sassayln or Geddon or Dahmzz look?

Did You Know?

Because women were forbidden to appear on stage, at many times in theater history, male actors played all roles.

1. In Greece 2,500 years ago, all major roles were played by 1-3 men who wore masks to distinguish among the characters.

2. In medieval Europe (1100-1400), the first plays permitted by the Catholic Church were presented during Easter Mass, and featured monks and priests playing the Virgin Mary and other women meeting the Angel at Christ's tomb on Easter morning.

3. In the traditional theater of China and Japan (Kabuki and Noh dramas), each male actor specialized in a particular kind of role. One of these roles was the young woman. Elaborate make-up helped the actor transform himself to play a woman.

4. In England's Shakespearean theater (1600s), the boys and young men of the acting company learned to act by playing female roles, including Romeo's Juliet!

Choose one character to illustrate. In your drawing, indicate your character's:

_____ height

_____ size and shape

_____ hair color

_____ costume

_____ age

Illustrate one of the settings:

The Land of Haven

The Temple of Doom

The caved the Old Mother

After the Performance

Compare your mental images of the characters and settings to those of the performance. How did the actors use their voices and movement to help you see the differences among characters? How were the various settings suggested?

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Listen For These Lines

Before the Performance

Dialogue is the playwright's main tool for revealing characters' personalities, and for sharing important ideas or "themes." What do these lines suggest about characters and themes in The Book of Miracles?

"Soon you will be leaving the ways of childhood. At the moment the dark moon begins to cover the light moon, you will ignite the ceremonial fire, and rejoin our community of magicians as an adult." - Brisbad

During the Performance

Listen carefully for these lines.

"It is much more powerful to believe than it is to know." - Old Mother

"Heroes can be children." - Old Mother

"But Magic belongs to everyone." - Sessayd in

"...don't be afraid of being afraid." - Old Mother

"The simplest things are always the most beautiful." - Old Mother

After the Performance

Compare your understandings of these lines with your friends. What other lines from the play stay in your memory?

Theater Conventions

Willing Suspension of Disbelief

A basic understanding between audience and performers is the agreement to "suspend disbelief": to pretend together that the play's action is real and is happening for the first time. This agreement often relies on the use of theater conventions (practices accepted as part of play making).

The following theater conventions are used in *The Book of Miracles:*

- **Actors speak directly to the audience.**
- **Two actors play many different characters, male and female, young and old, human and supernatural.**
- **Settings are suggested by use of description, actor movement, and lighting changes.**

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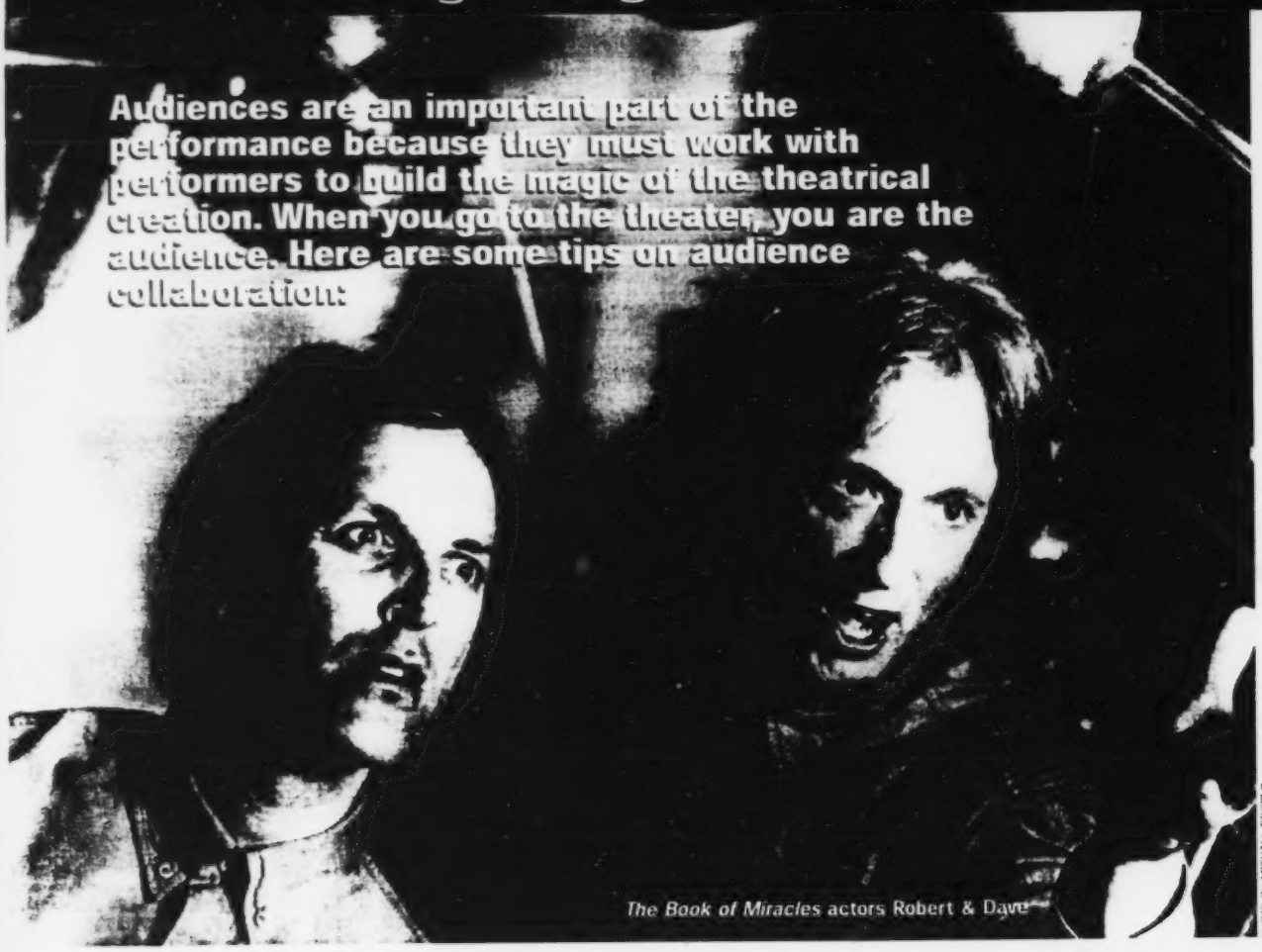
Building the Magic: Audience Collaboration


Audiences are an important part of the performance because they must work with performers to build the magic of the theatrical creation. When you go to the theater, you are the audience. Here are some tips on audience collaboration:

The Book of Miracles actors Robert & Dave

PHOTO BY MICHAEL COUPER

Before the Performance

When the performance is about to begin, the house lights will dim and go out. Be sure you become silent when this happens.

During the Performance

Use your imagination! The actors need you to watch and listen quietly, and envision the world they are creating with you. Talking to friends disturbs the performers and other members of the audience, even if they seem not to notice. Performers like it when you laugh when something is funny. They also like to hear you clap at the end of a performance when they bow.

After the Performance

Following the curtain call, the house lights come on. Follow the usher's directions for leaving the theater. Thank you for collaborating to build the magic.

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An **allegory** is a story in which the author uses characters, actions, and objects to stand for (symbolize) ideas. Allegories seek to teach or explain events in nature and the world.

A **symbol** is a physical object that stands for an idea. Candles on a birthday cake symbolize the number of years in a person's age. Each star on the American flag symbolizes one state. Actions can be symbols too. Standing up when the national anthem plays is a symbol of pride in country.

During the Performance

Watch for characters, actions, and objects that symbolize ideas. Imagine what the playwright might want you to think about.

The Greek myth of "Pandora's Box" is an example of allegory and symbols: A young woman, Pandora, is instructed not to open a mysterious box. But since her curiosity is so strong, she disobeys and opens the box. To her horror, a series of monsters, all the evils of the world (Hate, Vanity, Greed, Jealousy, etc.) burst out of the box with such force that she is unable to close the box until it is almost empty. At that point, the faint voice of Hope pleads to be released as well. Pandora finally allows Hope the freedom to follow the evils into the world.

What symbols can you find in this myth?

What does this allegory teach or explain?

The Book of Miracles is also an allegory that uses symbols.

After the Performance

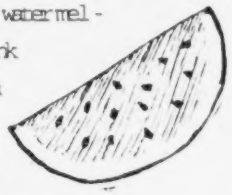
Questions for Thought:

(Please note: There are many correct answers to these questions).

1. Why is lighting a fire the act that allows Sessaylin to become an adult? What might the act of lighting a fire symbolize?

2. Why might the action take place during a "lunar eclipse," on the darkest night of the year? Why is an eclipse of two moons included?

3. The "seeds of fear" is a phrase that people use to suggest first feelings of fear. It does not mean actual seeds, like pumpkin or watermelon seeds. Why do you think Geddon's greatest weapon is the "Seeds of Fear"?



4. Why do you think only adult Haverites could be frozen by Geddon?

5. Can you explain why the identity of the Hero is a surprise? Why might it seem logical? What might it symbolize?

6. What are Sessaylin and Dahntz's strong and weak traits? How does each character help the other? Why is it symbolic that Dahntz can finally say, "Liberty"?

7. What does this allegory teach or explain?

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A Lesson in Breathing from Old Brisbad:

1. Lie on your bed or on the floor, put your hand on your stomach, and pant like a puppy for ten breaths. You should feel your hand bounce slightly as you breathe. The muscles under your hand are the most powerful breathing muscles in your body. (They make up your "diaphragm.")

2. Stand up as tall as you can (not on tip toe). Repeat the breathing exercise. Can you feel those same muscles "bounce"? If not, try again.

3. Once you are able to do this breathing exercise standing up, inhale (breathe in), trying to take longer and longer deep breaths. Let your tummy fill with air until you are "fat." Then exhale (let the air out) gradually until you are "thin" again. This is how athletes and performers are taught to breathe.

The next time you feel nervous, try this breathing exercise and you may find that you are able to calm down, and maybe even feel more confident, just like Sessaylin.

Brainstorm Alternate Titles

Is The Book of Miracles the best title for this play? Should it be called Sessayl in and Dahmtz, since they are the characters you see the most? Make a list of other titles that would fit this drama. Remember, sometimes an important object can symbolize a play's plot. Share your list of titles with your classmates.

Design a poster for *The Book of Miracles*

Illustrate some of the characters, a moment in the action, or one of the objects in the play. Explain your choices.

Take a Deep Breath

In The Book of Miracles, when Sessaylin is nervous during her initiation ceremony, Old Brisbad reminds her about her breathing.

You already know that when you learn to swim, you have to learn how to breathe all over again. Can you think of other activities where learning how to breathe is a necessary skill? Turn the page upside down for some answers.

Answers: Singing, playing an instrument, karate and other martial arts, yoga, acting!

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How Will I Know When I'm Grown Up?

In the play The Book of Miracles, both the Havenites and the Brohmuans have events which mark the progression from childhood to adulthood. Many cultures have such ceremonies:

In medieval Europe, and in early Native American, African, and Australian cultures, young men endured a series of ordeals, often alone, to prove their courage.

Jewish tradition calls for a 13 year-old to become a "bar mitzvah" (Hebrew meaning "son of the Commandments") or a "bat mitzvah" ("daughter of the Commandments"). This "coming of age" occurs in a ceremony in a synagogue, and marks the youth's acceptance of adult moral and religious responsibilities.

At age 15, Hispanic girls commemorate coming of age with a celebration called la quinceañera

When Amish couples marry, the young man begins growing a beard that he will keep for life and the young woman exchanges her white apron for a dark colored one.

If you want to read books about magic and growing up, try:

Wise Child by Monica Furlong

A Swiftly Tilting Planet by Madeleine L'Engle

Storm at the Edge of Time by Pamela F. Service

In contemporary American culture, several informal occasions mark the move to maturity. These include:

- getting a driver's license
- attending a senior prom
- graduating from high school
- inheriting a treasured item from an older family member

Can you think of other examples? Does your family have its own "initiations" or traditions?

Share your ideas with classmates.

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The Book of Miracles

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